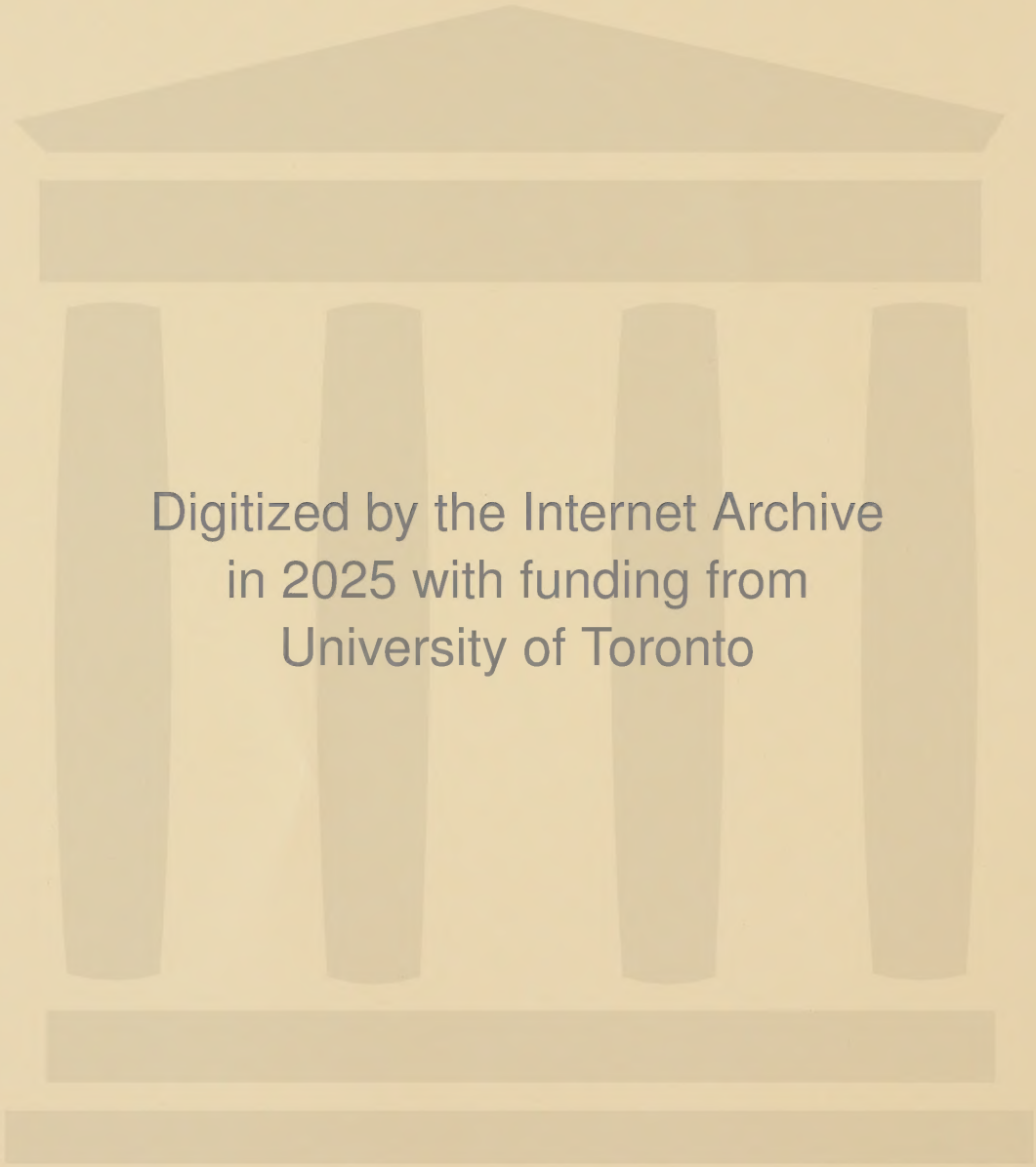
'The Ingenious Hogarth'

Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library

June 22 - September 18, 1987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"The Ingenious Hogarth"
an exhibition of prints by
William Hogarth
at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
University of Toronto

June 22 - September 18 1987

"The Ingenious Hogarth"

Looking back at William Hogarth's life from the vantage point of two hundred years one sees that it was patterned by a number of conflicting ideas. Known today for such series as A Rake's Progress and Marriage a-la-Mode and for prints like Gin Lane, he is remembered chiefly as a satirist. It is forgotten that his first aim was to succeed as a "history painter", then considered to be a gentlemanly occupation, and exemplified for Hogarth by Sir James Thornhill, decorator of the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral and painter of many pictures valued by the "connoisseurs", the men of wealth and "taste" who were able to commission them.

William Hogarth was born in 1697, the son of a failed schoolmaster and Latin scholar who had turned to hack writing to eke out a rather precarious existence. He grew up in the area of London made famous by Smithfield Market and the annual Bartholomew Fair, an area teeming with life and colour. An indifferent student, he later wrote:

> "When at school my exercises were more remarkable for the ornaments which adorn'd them then for the exercise itself." (Autobiographical Notes, p. 204)

With his artistic talent thus manifesting itself early and the family fortunes being what they were, it is not surprising that, at the age of seventeen, he was apprenticed to Ellis Gamble, a silver-plate engraver. However, he found this type of work too confining and by 1720 had set himself up in business as an engraver on copper. His first commissions were small pieces such as coats-of-arms, bookplates and shop advertisements but gradually he moved into the production of book illustrations and prints. He was much influenced by the emblem literature and it is no wonder that allegorical images early entered his work and remained a feature of it.

The early 1730's were years of self education, a kind of second apprenticeship. He developed his own method of working:

> "which was the retaining in my minds Eye without drawing upon the spot whatever I wanted [to] imitate & soon found by experience this was the readiest and least laborious way for by this means my studies and my Pleasures went hand in hand & the most striking incidents that presented themselves to my view ever made the strongest impressions on my memory in their whole for Subjects and in there parts for Execution, and which often were such kind of subjects as seldom or ever were done in the manner they seemd capable of being represented in." (ibid., p. 210-211)

This period, remembered in his old age as one of carefree youth, came to an end with his marriage on 23 March 1729 to Jane Thornhill, daughter of the man whose work he so much admired. Already becoming

known as a painter, he now turned to portrait painting as a surer way of supporting a family and achieved considerable success in this field (see Case 3). The portrait of Garrick in the Character of Richard the 3d (1746) was particularly admired, the original bringing him £200, a fact of which he was inordinately proud.

With the publication of his first independent print, Masquerades and Operas, in 1724 Hogarth was already declaring war on the connoisseurs, although at this period many of his commissions came from the aristocracy. It attacked the prevailing fashions of the time and those who decried the work of Sir James Thornhill. By 1732, when he offered for sale by subscription the prints of A Harlot's Progress, his position was secure both as a fashionable painter and as a popular engraver. Contemporaries, like his rival George Vertue, were amazed at his speedy rise to fame and fortune.

The practice of issuing a receipt or subscription ticket which began with A Harlot's Progress, both advertised Hogarth's engravings and attracted prospective buyers. This method proved very successful, especially as, by first offering the prints to subscribers, he was able to circumvent the voracity of the printsellers which had plagued his earlier productions. These tickets were often reissued in different forms. Boys Peeping at Nature (1731), the ticket for A Harlot's Progress, reappeared in 1751 with altered design as the ticket for Moses Brought to Pharaoh's Daughter and Paul Before Felix. In its original state it included a tag from Horace implying that, with A Harlot's Progress, Hogarth was introducing a new art form.

The pattern of creating, publicizing and publishing his work was now established. First, the painting was exhibited in his shop for all to see; then came the subscription ticket; finally the prints were engraved and supplied to the subscribers. The remaining prints were sold in his shop at a slightly higher price and distributed to printsellers throughout the country. This process is illustrated in Case 1 with A Midnight Modern Conversation. Exhibited are: an original painting; the subscription ticket, A Chorus of Singers; and the engraving, first issued in 1733.

A Midnight Modern Conversation was a "conversation piece", a picture that had to be read, an allegorical representation of life as Hogarth saw it. The caption neatly sums this up:

> "Think not to find one meant resemblance there
> We lash the vices but the persons spare
> Prints should be prizd as authors should be read
> Who sharply smile prevailing folly dead."

In actual fact he did not mean this, having early realized that the possibility of discovering real resemblances increased sales.

It is now that the paradoxes of Hogarth's life began to make their appearance. Was he engraving for the general public or painting for the private collector? Was he, in fact, a painter or an engraver? Was he aiming for a comic or a serious style? Was he a caricaturist or a history painter? He was never accepted or appreciated by the art critics,

art dealers or collectors of his own time and it is only in retrospect that his greatness can be seen. As a chronicler and commentator on contemporary morals and behaviour he is unequalled.

The difficulty of engraving from an existing painting was a source of continual annoyance for Hogarth and time was spent trying to find engravers able enough to do the job for him. Often he was forced to do his own engraving and even when he did find an engraver he still preferred to deal with the faces himself. This inevitably led not only to delays in getting the prints to the subscribers, but also to carelessness. Look, for example, at the swordsman on the right side of Southwark Fair who holds his sword awkwardly in his left hand. Engraving a painting meant that it had to be reversed on the plate as the print is necessarily the mirror image of the plate from which it is made.

The other great problem Hogarth experienced from the beginning was with pirates who rushed his pictures into print before he had a chance to profit from them. In October 1733 he took the first step to safeguard himself by acquiring a shop-cum-gallery, the "Golden Head" in Leicester Fields. The Head was a likeness of Sir Anthony Van Dyck, thus signifying the type of shop it was intended to be. The second step was to petition Parliament, in conjunction with other artists, for the same type of protection that writers had achieved in the reign of Queen Anne. The result was the speedy passage through both Houses of the Engravers' Act which received royal assent on 15 May 1735. Often known as Hogarth's Act, it provided that "from and after 24 June 1735 artists should have a fourteen-year copyright in their work and that anyone infringing the copyright should be fined."

The day after the Act came into force Hogarth issued the prints of A Rake's Progress which he had deliberately kept back until they could be protected. This series of eight plates was popular from the start, chronicling the unhappy looking rake's attempt to enter the world of high society on the money collected by his miserly father, and his ultimate failure. They are in sharp contrast to the lively scene in the companion piece, Southwark Fair, where the members of the lower levels of society are shown enjoying themselves. The two worlds come together in The Laughing Audience, the subscription ticket for both, with the lower classes at the bottom happily engrossed in the play but the fashionable figures at the top only interested in their flirtations.

> "Subjects I consider'd as writers do. My Picture was my Stage and men and women my actors who were by Mean of certain Actions and express[ions] to Exhibit a dumb shew." (ibid., p. 209)

By this time Hogarth's popularity was secure. His prints hung everywhere. He himself, however, was not satisfied. The very popularity of his engravings detracted from his reputation as a serious painter and his aristocratic patrons were being replaced by the prosperous middle classes to whom his subjects made the most appeal. The connoisseur was still, in his opinion, bound by the prevailing idea that only what was foreign, French and Italian in particular, deserved

the name of art. And Hogarth was so very English!

At the end of April 1734 Sir James Thornhill died suddenly and Hogarth at once sought not only to assume his mantle but to surpass him to become England's great history painter. However, the paintings, The Pool of Bethesda (1736) and The Good Samaritan (1737), executed for the great staircase at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, with which he hoped to achieve this ambition, lack the life and immediacy of his contemporary subjects and are not particularly successful.

In 1742 the novelist, Henry Fielding, neatly summed up Hogarth's art and, incidentally, pointed out the affinities between Hogarth's type of work and his own in his Preface to The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews:

> "Let us examine the Works of a Comic History-Painter, with those Performances which the Italians call Caricatura; where we shall find the true Excellence of the former to consist in the exactest Copy of Nature ... Whereas in the Caricatura we allow all Licence. Its Aim is to exhibit Monsters not Men ...
>
> He who should call the Ingenious Hogarth a Burlesque Painter, would in my Opinion, do him very little Honour: for sure it is much easier, much less the Subject of Admiration, to paint a Man with a Nose, or any other Feature of a preposterous Size, or to expose him in some absurd or monstrous Attitude, than to express the Affections of Men on Canvas. It hath been thought a vast Commendation of a Painter, to say his Figures seem to breath; but surely, it is a much greater and nobler Applause, that they appear to think." (p. viii-ix)

With these words Fielding gave the "Ingenious" Hogarth a hook on which to hang his paintings and from now on he adopted the term "comic history" to describe them. Characters and Caricaturas, the subscription ticket for Marriage a-la-Mode, reinforces Fielding's ideas by distinguishing between caricatures and his own "characters" and refers to this Preface for further explanation.

In April 1743 Hogarth advertised the subscription for "Six Prints from Copper-Plates, engrav'd by the best Masters in Paris, after his own Paintings; representing a Variety of Modern Occurences in High-Life, and call'd MARRIAGE A-LA-MODE." By offering a high-life setting, a French style of composition and the work of French engravers, he hoped to attract both the connoisseur and the common man, and to show once and for all that he was more than a mere caricaturist and "burlesque painter". With the publication of the engravings in 1745 his career had reached its height. Despite the success of the subscription, however, Hogarth's various attempts to auction off his paintings brought him much less than he hoped for and he took this to mean that his comic history style had failed to impress the fashionable world.

In disgust he now turned again to producing popular engravings. He began with Industry and Idleness (1747), twelve prints made from

drawings not paintings and much simpler and less "finished" than his earlier work. They graphically chronicle the careers of two apprentices, one to fame and fortune, the other to poverty and death by the hangman.

Although Hogarth disliked France and French fashions his work was popular there. In 1748 he travelled to Paris intending not only to find engravers but also to attract new buyers. On his return he stopped in Calais to draw its gate and was arrested as a spy. Out of this experience came O the Roast Beef of Old England &c. (the title of a popular song) later known as The Gate of Calais. It shows his opinion of France, much as if presented on a stage, and points out the contrast between the "parade of religion", so disliked by him, and the starving people looking hungrily at a joint of beef being carried to an English tavern. The artist himself appears on the left, drawing the scene and oblivious of the hand on his shoulder about to arrest him. There is here a very successful combination of the serious style to which he aspired and the comic style to which his enemies accused him of being limited.

The March to Finchley (1750, retouched 1761) points out another contrast, that between the lively disorderly crowd in the foreground and the disciplined soldiers in the background. It is contrasts like this that give Hogarth's best work its stunning effect. Beer Street and Gin Lane (1751), two contrasting prints with the simplicity of woodcuts, show the evils of gin and the happiness that results when ale is substituted for gin. The powerful images of Gin Lane remain in the memory and, although we know they must be exaggerations, have come to symbolize one facet of eighteenth-century life.

In the 1740's Hogarth made another effort to have himself acknowledged as the great English history painter with Moses Brought to Pharaoh's Daughter, painted for the Foundling Hospital of which he was a governor, and Paul Before Felix, intended for Lincoln's Inn Chapel. Both were engraved in 1752 but the subscription ticket, Paul Before Felix Burlesqued (1751) "design'd & etch'd in the rediculous manner of Rembrant," although much more popular than either, merely confirmed the connoisseurs' opinion of Hogarth as a caricaturist.

In 1749 Hogarth issued a self portrait, engraved from a 1745 painting, which included the enigmatic phrase, "the line of beauty" over a curving line. His purpose was to mystify the art world of London and then, once everyone was thoroughly intrigued, explain once and for all what it was that made a picture beautiful. At this period much discussion was taking place concerning the nature of the sublime and the beautiful in art and, with his book, The Analysis of Beauty, published in 1753, Hogarth intended to settle the question. The subscription ticket, Columbus Breaking the Egg, indicated what sort of book it would be. Hogarth's personal voyage to discover the secret of beauty had been just as momentous as that of Columbus to discover the new world, and only he could have made it. The story is well known. Columbus, when told that anyone could have made the discovery, is said to have challenged those present to stand an egg on its end and, when they failed, to have broken his own to make it stand by

itself, thus proving that only he had possessed the necessary imagination and courage.

The Analysis of Beauty sets out the results of Hogarth's deliberations on the subject:

> "For as among the vast variety of waving-lines that may be conceiv'd, there is but one that truly deserves the name of *the line of beauty*, so there is only one precise serpentine-line that I call *the line of grace*." (p. 52)

Two explanatory plates accompany the book, one serious, one comic. At the top in the centre of the first is Hogarth's ideal, "the precise serpentine line, or *line of grace* ... represented by a fine wire, properly twisted round the elegant and varied figure of a cone" (p. 39). In the second, the couple at the left represents the ideal of grace, both in movement and shape.

Unfortunately, the Analysis, though praised by his friends, was received by his enemies with ridicule and caricatured mainly because of the Preface in which he reviewed the history of painting. The attacks were two-pronged: Hogarth's alleged contempt for the great Italian masters; and his supposed inability to paint serious subjects without introducing the element of burlesque.

Throughout his career Hogarth had avoided politics as a subject for his prints but now, when he was being attacked on all sides and politics was much to the fore with a general election in 1754, he hoped to retrieve his position by seeking political patronage. The abuses of the electoral system were particularly emphasized by scandalous clashes in Oxfordshire between the Whigs and the Tories, and his first painting for the series Four Prints of an Election, heralded events which actually took place in that county. An Election Entertainment probably completed by March of that year showed a feast remarkably similar to one that took place in April when the electors went to the polls. Due to problems with getting the paintings engraved, the prints appeared over three years, from 1755 to 1758 and from them came at least one success. In 1757 Hogarth was at last appointed Serjeant-Painter to the King, in succession to Sir James Thornhill and Thornhill's son, John, who died that autumn. This did bring him some new portrait commissions and he celebrated the honour by painting a final self portrait (1758) which he retouched in 1764. It showed himself painting the Comic Muse, with Comedy illustrating the "line of beauty". The 1764 retouching echoes the disillusionment of Hogarth's last years with darker shadows and lines added to the original print and the caption "Serjeant Painter to His Majesty" replaced by his name and the new date.

Some of Hogarth's best work still remained to be done, and the very topicality of his subject matter added to its popularity. The Cockpit (1759) was a satire on the evils of gambling. The Five Orders of Periwigs (1761), based on the preposterous hairdo's of the spectators at George III's coronation, was a parody of the five orders of architecture beloved by the connoisseurs. But his last years were

embittered by the savage treatment he received from John Wilkes, politician and editor of The North Briton, the poet Charles Churchill, and others. His own indiscretions brought the rancour of his enemies to a head. They began, in the first state of The Bench (1758), with an ill-advised reference to the caricaturist and politician, George Townshend, whose caricatures Hogarth disliked. In this print Hogarth again attempted to explain "the different meaning of the Words Character, Caracatura and Outrè in Painting and Drawing." In later states of the print the phrase "Address'd to the Honble Coll. T---s---d" was dropped, but it had revived the old controversy as to Hogarth's status. Was he a caricaturist like Townshend or something more? His spelling was another point of dissention. Anyone who could mis-spell "caricatura" had little right to condemn the work of others as he could not have understood its meaning correctly. The print was reworked in 1764 and some spelling corrections were made, but not that one.

The fiasco over Sigismunda added to Hogarth's problems. He was commissioned by Sir Richard Grosvenor to paint a picture along the lines of one already done in his "comic history" style for Lord Charlemont. Instead, angered by the price of over £400 paid for a supposed Correggio, he decided to paint the same subject, Sigismunda Weeping Over the Heart of Guiscardo. Not only was it to outdo the work of the old masters but also to amaze with its realism. Hogarth apparently used a real heart and blood from it could be seen on Sigismunda's fingers. Grosvenor was horrified and refused to accept the painting. Unable to get the £500 he demanded for it, Hogarth struggled for the rest of his life to have it declared a masterpiece. An attempt to have it engraved brought only fifty subscriptions and the project was abandoned. The subscription ticket, Time Smoking a Picture, is Hogarth's comment on the whole affair: pictures are valued by the connoisseurs only for their age and the effect on them of time.

With The Times, Plate 1 in 1762, Hogarth committed his last indiscretion. Although "the subject ... tended to Peace and unanimity" (Autobiographical Notes, p. 221) it in fact stirred up controversy as it defended the unpopular ministry of Lord Bute and attacked William Pitt and his party. It called forth many satirical replies, one of the most damning being published by John Wilkes in The North Briton, no. 17:

> "The humourous Mr. Hogarth, the *supposed* author of the *Analysis of Beauty*, has at last entered the list of politicians, and given us a print of THE TIMES. *Words are man's province*, says *Pope*, but they are not Mr. *Hogarth's* province ... We all titter the instant he takes up a *pen*, but we tremble when we see the *pencil* in his hand."

The onslaught continued for months and climaxed in June 1763 with Charles Churchill's Epistle to William Hogarth. Although worn-out and ill, Hogarth retaliated with a vicious portrait of Wilkes and a caricature of Churchill in the character of a bear, which he called The Bruiser. The latter he made out of the plate first used in 1749 for his own self portrait.

The last months of his life Hogarth spent working on his Autobiographical Notes and the Apology for Painters, neither of which was published until very recently. He projected an edition of his prints and his very last engraving was the tailpiece for this. Called The Bathos, or Manner of Sinking, in Sublime Paintings, inscribed to the Dealers in Dark Pictures it is his final embittered comment on his life. Everything is coming to an end; Time itself is expiring. It is also a last parody on the type of painting and aesthetic theory which Hogarth had been attacking all along. Six months after its publication Hogarth died, on 25 October, 1764.

The prints came to the Library as a generous gift from Louis Melzack, founder of Classics Bookstores. They were originally mounted in an album once owned by George Stephen (1829-1921). Created Baron Mount Stephen in 1891, he was instrumental in building the Canadian Pacific Railway and President of that Company from 1882 to 1888.

The collection includes many prints not being displayed. Viewers are invited to see more by enquiring at the Reference Desk in the Fisher Library.

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Paulson, Ronald. Hogarth's Graphic Works. Rev. ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970. v. 1.

Jarrett, Derek. The Ingenious Mr. Hogarth. London: M. Joseph, 1976.

CASE 1

Boys Peeping at Nature (1751)

First issued in 1731 as the subscription ticket for A Harlot's Progress; re-issued in 1751 as a subscription ticket for Moses Brought to Pharoah's Daughter and Paul Before Felix.

A Midnight Modern Conversation

Original painting. Probably painted in 1730 or 1731.

Engraving. First issued in 1733.

A Chorus of Singers (ca. 1737)

First issued in 1732 as the subscription ticket for A Midnight Modern Conversation. A rehearsal of the oratorio Judith; words by William Huggins, music by William Defesch.

Southwark Fair (1733 [i.e. 1734?])

The Laughing Audience (ca. 1737)

First issued in 1733 as the subscription ticket for Southwark Fair and A Rake's Progress.

CASE 2

Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn (1738)

The Company of Undertakers (1736)

Also known as: A Consultation of Physicians.

Scholars at a Lecture (1736)

The Enraged Musician (1741)

Henry Fielding (1707-1754) The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews. 2nd ed. London: Printed for A. Millar, 1742. Vol. 1.

Characters and Caricaturas (1743)

First issued as the subscription ticket for Marriage a-la-Mode.

CASE 3

Martin Folkes Esq^r^

First issued in 1742.
President of the Royal Society.

Benjamin Hoadly (1743)

Bishop of Winchester.

Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat (1746)

Executed in 1747 for high treason. He was the last man in England to be beheaded.

Mr. Garrick in the Character of Richard the 3^d^ (1746)

CASE 4

Marriage a-la-Mode (1745)

Six Plates. Plates 1 and 6 engraved by G. Scotin, 2 and 3 by B. Baron, 4 and 5 by S. Ravenet.

CASE 5

The Gate of Calais (1749)

The March to Finchley (1750, retouched 1761)

Beer Street and Gin Lane (1751)

Gulielmus Hogarth (1801)

Painted in 1745, first engraved in 1749. Hogarth with his dog, Trump. Engraved by Thomas Cook after Hogarth.

CASE 6

The Analysis of Beauty. London: Printed by J. Reeves for the Author, 1753.

Plates 1 and 2 for The Analysis of Beauty (1753)

Columbus Breaking the Egg (1753)

First issued as the subscription ticket for The Analysis of Beauty.

CASE 7

An Election Entertainment (1755)

Plate 1 from Four Prints of an Election.

The Bench (1758, reworked 1764)

The Cockpit (1759)

The Five Orders of Periwigs (1761)

Time Smoking a Picture.

First issued in 1761 as the subscription ticket for Sigismunda.

CASE 8

Hogarth Painting the Comic Muse (1758, retouched 1764)

The Times, Plate 1 (1762)

The Bruiser (1763)

Made from the plate for the 1749 self portrait, much reworked.

The Bathos (1764)

The North Briton, no. 17, May 21, 1762.

Charles Churchill (1731-1764) An Epistle to William Hogarth. London: Printed for the Author, and sold by J. Coote, 1763.

West Reading Room

A Rake's Progress (1735)

Plates 1-8.
Plate 8 retouched 1763.

East Reading Room

Left Case

Industry and Idleness (1747)

Plates 1-3 and 10-12.

Right Case

The Good Samaritan (1772)

Painted in 1737.
Engraved by Ravenet & Delatre after Hogarth.

Paul Before Felix (1752)

Paul Before Felix Burlesqued (1751)

First issued as a subscription ticket for Moses Brought to Pharaoh's Daughter and Paul Before Felix.

Sigismunda (1795)

Painted in 1759.
Engraved by Benj^{n}. Smith after Hogarth.

Exhibition: Anne Jocz

Typed by: June Felix

Front cover: Tom Reid; reproduced from Scholars at a Lecture (1736)

Mounted by: Emrys Evans and Linda Joy